

# City of Newburgh

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## PRESS RELEASE

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**For immediate release**

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### City of Newburgh Celebrates Grand Opening Of the Courthouse at the former Broadway School

City and court officials celebrated the grand opening of the new courthouse at the former Broadway School on June 11, 2009. The project took nearly two years to complete, and faced its share of difficulties, including the unearthing of a long-abandoned African American cemetery on the site, but the end result, according to those in attendance, was well worth the wait.

The Honorable Judge Jeffrey G. Berry, County Court Judge and Supervising Judge of City Courts, 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, and a Newburgh native, presided over the opening ceremonies. Judge Berry commented, “The courthouse’s location in the heart of the City of Newburgh makes it accessible for all City of Newburgh residents. Also, this is a building with great history and beauty, and a building that will last for generations to come.”

Mayor Nicholas J. Valentine added, “One of the amazing things about this project is the way that from beginning to end, the community has been extremely vocal and passionately involved in what went on here. In the beginning, it was clear that the community did not support new construction of a courthouse on lower Broadway, and as time went on, it became equally clear that they thought this beautiful building, a Newburgh landmark, was the ideal site for the new courthouse.”

In addition to a new main entrance located on its north side, the 50,000 square-foot facility includes three court rooms, hearing and jury deliberation rooms, offices for the judges, their staff, and support services, and even a pleasant children’s room. The lower level houses a detention facility for prisoners awaiting appearances before a judge and is designed in such a way that it can also serve as the city’s overnight lock-up.

The spaciousness of the new courthouse is a welcome change after the former lodgings at the Public Safety Building on lower Broadway, court officials agreed.

Hon. Alan D. Scheinkman, Justice of the Supreme Court, Administrative Judge, 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, commented, "On behalf of Chief Judge Lippman and the Unified Court System, I congratulate the City of Newburgh on the opening of this wonderful new courthouse, a place where justice may be rendered in an atmosphere of dignity and respect, and express our deep appreciation for all of the hard work and dedication that went into the development and construction of this new building."

Honorable B. Harold Ramsey added, "It is my great pleasure and honor to be here for the dedication of this beautiful courthouse here in the City of Newburgh. First and foremost, this courthouse belongs to the people. It is a place where they can come to get justice, equality and fairness for all under the law. As the late Justice Thurgood Marshall said, 'It's not justice if it's not equal.' For the judges and staff here, this is more than a commitment to justice. It is an awesome responsibility that goes far beyond the courthouse. It goes to the very foundation of our community and its fundamental values. In a special way, this building, part old and part new, represents a convergence of the past with the present. Moreover, it speaks to the diversity and continuity of Newburgh that makes all of us partners in the quest for excellence in government."

The former Broadway School was built in 1909, with little attention being paid to the cemetery that was unearthed during its construction. Over the years, the history and heritage of the Colored Burial Ground at the site receded into distant memory. In March of 2008, as the work to place the footings for the new building were nearly complete, the remains of three individuals surfaced after a rainstorm.

After investigation determined the remains were from an old cemetery, City officials convened a group of community members and religious leaders to help advise them as work progressed. More than 100 sets of remains were discovered; most were placed in the custody of the New York State Museum to await re-interment on the site. The Colored Burial Ground Advisory Committee continues to meet regularly to learn what they can about those buried here, and to plan a suitable memorial. Members of the Committee, including chairperson Richard Peterson, Dr. Benilda Armstead-Jones, and Fr. Bill Scafidi participated in the courthouse dedication.

Richard Peterson commented, "Many of us are working hard to give the invisible deceased interred here representation and meaning. We are striving to create a suitable commemoration and memorial for the Burial Ground."

Mayor Valentine read a statement, signed by the entire City Council and Acting City Manager, about the inhumane disregard for the Burial Ground on behalf of "any and all persons and institutions, past or present, who actively or passively transgressed by despoiling the sanctity of this sacred space."

He commented, "We cannot change what was done in the past, but we can do everything in our power to ensure that the people of the City of Newburgh in 2009 are remembered for doing the right thing about this burial ground and those interred here. From the beginning, the community and our officials made a commitment to see that

these former residents of our City received the respect and honor they deserve. It is appropriate that in this place of justice, we pledge ourselves to ensuring that this great injustice is not repeated; and we challenge all the residents of the City of Newburgh, now and for generations to come, to continue to protect, preserve, and dignify this sacred place. This beautiful building will continue as a tangible symbol of not only the City's proud past, but its bright future."